

# Ebb and flow of

The paparazzi have been pestering Paparoa — or at least writer **Lindy Laird** and photographer **Michael Cunningham** check out what the town looks like with a fresh coat of lippie.

## SAM HUNT

from  
*Salt  
River  
Songs*



1.

*Never the sparkling waters or the beautiful daughters as sparkling as they be — it's a muddy creek for me twisting and turning on Kaipara time floating down stream. On the next tide, returning.*

2.

*The Landing built roughly where early settlers landed — months at sea behind them, more months' uncertainty. They ended up in a land they never had in mind. I'll be leaving by the Landing on Kaipara time.*

3.

*A fisherman from Pahi got a mermaid in his net — good as a man can get when he falls in love at sea on Kaipara time, the nets well set: that, and immaculate timing of tides.*

6.

*I see you up in town, we meet on the street: good to see you I say, you say it's good to see me. You're moving east you tell me. I wish you a clear sea . . . meantime, Kaipara time, it's a muddy creek for me.*

(*Salt River Songs*, publishers Potton and Burton)

**T**HE scuttlebutt is that Paparoa — population 300 on a big day — is having a bit of a fling with

Auckland.

Paparoa is one of several little old towns that have discharged their earlier settler duties and now perch unfussily at the head of the Kaipara's salt water rivers.

The towns were once the landing places in a roadless world. Long before pioneers arrived in sailing ships — the bushmen, millers, missionaries, traders, entrepreneurs and farmer settlers — Maori paddled their waka on the long fingers of the big-handed harbour.

In places where another race of adventurers would land, those first people planted kumara, ate fat fern and kai moana, politicked and partnered, waged war, nursed wounds and grudges.

The boatyards and timber mills, the stockyards, dairy factories and railway of a later time are nearly all silent now.

State Highway 12 isn't so quiet; it's a roaring chain linking commerce, primary produce, hungry Auckland, flash-harry Mangawhai, find me if you can Hokianga and take me as you find me Far North.

But Paparoa's valleys and peninsulas fatten just about as many a lifestyle block as farm stock these days, and the town is only a lunch date away from many-where.

**W**E KNOW we're on the right track as we come in through the side door, having taken the Oakleigh route from Whangarei rather than the



**PICNIC TIME:** Residents from Kaurilands Skills Centre at nearby Tokatoka enjoy their weekly picnic at Paparoa.



state highways. There's an old dishwasher wedged in a tree in a roadside paddock. Cute. We're way above a flood line.

We come across a classic, red and white post-pioneer post office-cum-B&B, a mix of weatherboard do-ups and done-ups, a woodworker's shop and opposite, up Hook Rd, Christ's own small holding.

Among the onion flowers, reeds, weeds and funereal lillies, sheep graze in the old

Methodist cemetery. One of them rubs its bum on a tilting headstone. Fifty metres up the road, the Anglican church looks far more pastoral, less pasture-al.

Down on the main drag, the township spreads itself languidly between centuries; SH12 carving its way between charming colonial and charmless newer buildings, olive coloured mangroves and paddocks so green it hurts your eyes.

There's a general store,

which survives despite the pull of Whangarei's supermarkets. There's a heritage bank building that has had a couple of reincarnations as cafe/bar. There's the flat-topped Cruisers Bar that apparently pumps at night and — this is no joke — the revival of the Paparoa Hotel into a celebration of the 1950s.

One local woman is literally stepping up to the plate and plans to open an outlet for her current online



**MOBILE:** Draper Robyn Skelton says the town's population is "very mobile" these days.

# Paparooa



**PLENTY TO DO:** Signs of a town spirit.

They've witnessed many changes in their neck of the woods over the years, and seen perennial concerns sprout — such as “will there be any new volunteers come along to do the community gardening when the current lot get too old”.

It always comes right in the end. “There’s a really good community spirit here,” Sally says.

Graham and co organise the weekly Saturday Farmers’ Market. Many’s the time they’ve asked people if they should call it off and had a resounding “No!”. Stall holders are local food producers, usually selling fish, oysters, olive oil, veges, honey, plants, coffee, bread, mussel fritters, bacon and egg sandwiches.

They’ll all be out at the Village Green on November 5 for the Proudly Paparooa day of garden, art and heritage trails, community groups touting their good works, local businesses putting on their game face.

Customers will be the fulltime locals, highway traveller and weekenders from mainly Auckland coming to their sheds turned into baches, baches turned into holiday houses, boat houses turned into beach houses, large

holdings chopped into small holdings.

It’s part of the old and the new, an ageless rhythm life in the gentle valleys and hills, and along the winter green and summer flaxen, mudflat fringed salt river peninsulas.

Dress it how you like, it’s unlikely this place will ever completely thin the mud in its blood, shed the salt from its skin.

the hill and think ‘I have no idea who lives in there now’.

“People come in and after you’ve seen them a couple of times you think, ‘they must be new locals’.”

Pork farmers and several-generation locals, Sally Taylor puts out the monthly *Paparooa Press* newsletter while husband Graham Taylor is the main man behind Progressive Paparooa Inc.

business, buying and selling old china. There’s an art gallery in the former district council office.

**S**KELTONS Paparooa Drapery is something of a legend. The inimitable Doreen Skelton ran it forever but now her daughter Robyn — “born and bred here” — sells the school uniforms, workwear and other clothing, the haberdashery, china, garish decorations, bits and bobs.

“The population is very mobile these days,” she confides. “You used to know everybody. Now you drive up



**TASTE TEST:** Kevin Cholmondeley-Smith, finding the level.

## Let’s do the timewarp again

**T**HE middle-of-the-road Paparooa Hotel isn’t pretending to be younger, or even older.

The pub is stuck with its square, no-nonsense mid-1950s face, says manager Kevin Cholmondeley-Smith.

“It’s an interesting building in that it was built for the times and it doesn’t suit modern ideas of style. It can’t fit the colonial, contemporary or Irish bar trends.

“It’s stuck in a time warp.”

So what better to do with a pub that needed refurbishing — on a limited spend — than allow it to stay relevant to its own era.

“But bring it into the modern day with facilities, equipment and service.”

Enter 1950’s turquoise, cream and blush of peach, china and trays, wall mounted plates, an inviting dining room or the choice of eating in one of the bars (the restaurant renamed the Thirsty Tui), plans for a garden bar.

The pub closed for seven weeks while the reno took place. As well as sprucing up all public areas, the kitchen has been refitted: “There was only a deep fryer and a domestic stove.”

Fare that could entice not just locals but people from far away includes Kaipara flounder and oysters, pulled pork, beef cheeks, sausages made to the pub’s own recipe, or pizza, burgers, bar snacks, coffee to go, real fruit icecream . . .

There will be live music, with jazz, country and karaoke evenings, other entertainment and club nights.

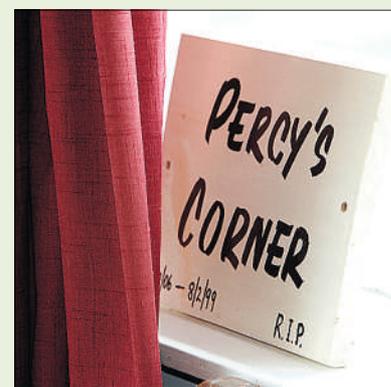
The Paparooa pub is owned by a family trust, and director Pam Goode, daughter of the late Dave and Joan Goode, is the establishment’s second generation hotelier. She grew up there, now lives in Auckland, and is totally involved in the upgrade.

Cholmondeley-Smith, who Ms Goode put in as manager after bringing him in to “help rethink” the pub, grew up in Mangawhai before a career in hospitality management and consultancy in New Zealand and overseas.

So far even the bar regulars, who at first grumbled that their pub was about to be “changed”, are happy.

“They came in for the pool night after the refurbishment, and loved it.”

It’ll be a bit of a taste test for a while, Cholmondeley-Smith admits: “Until we find the level. We do have to cater to locals as well as passers-by and visitors.”



Paparooa is, he points out, “one and a half hours from the top of bridge”. No guesses about what bridge that is.

“It’s really in its infancy, Paparooa, and the area in general will grow.

“This is no stupid expectation.”

The day we’re there the sun is shining on Paparooa, and the pretty spring light pours through the pub’s windows. Little posies and daffodils add splashes of colour.

The 1950s, whose time has not yet come, sits waiting to be discovered.

It’s kind of cute, it’s old-town Kiwiana before its time. Who knew you could blend high tearoom elegance with booze-based country pub?

**THERE’S A REALLY GOOD COMMUNITY SPIRIT HERE.**